

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-11 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2714

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 2024/1

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, BL, CI, PE

SUBJECT: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BOLIVIA'S QUEST FOR AN ACCESS
TO THE SEA.

PANAMA FOR USCINCSO

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: PRESIDENT BANZER'S MID-MARCH INTERVIEW WITH CHILEAN PRESIDENT PINOCHET IN BRASILIA, WHERE BOTH MEN WERE ATTENDING THE INAUGURATION OF BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT ERNESTO GEISEL, SET OFF A WAVE OF SPECULATIVE COMMENTARY IN BOLIVIA ON PROSPECTS FOR REALIZING THE COUNTRY'S LONG-STANDING DESIRE TO REGAIN AN ACCESS TO THE SEA. BANZER HIMSELF DID MUCH TO STIMULATE THIS RENEWED UPSURGE OF INTEREST IN THE HISTORIC BOLIVIAN OBSESSION WITH "RETURNING TO THE SEA" BY HIS OPTIMISTIC APPRAISALS OF THE OUTCOME OF HIS TALKS WITH PINOCHET. ALTHOUGH THE BANZER-PINOCHET MEETING COINCIDED WITH THE BEGINNING OF BOLIVIA'S ANNUAL "WEEK OF THE SEA" CELEBRATIONS, MOST BOLIVIAN POLITICAL OBSERVERS DISPLAYED A NEW WILLINGNESS, IN THE WAKE OF THE TALKS, CONFIDENTIAL

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TO PUT ASIDE PATRIOTIC RHETORIC IN FAVOR OF A PRAGMATIC SEARCH

FOR POSSIBLE GROUNDS OF AGREEMENT WITH ITS PACIFIC COAST NEIGHBORS. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, POLITICIANS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ALIKE REALIZED THE ENORMOUS DIFFICULTIES FACING BOLIVIA IN ITS EFFORTS TO CONVINCE CHILE AND/OR PERU TO GRANT IT RENEWED DIRECT ACCESS TO THE SEA. THE MAJOR POINT UPON WHICH BOTH THE MAJORITY OF POLITICAL OBSERVERS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF BOLIVIA ITSELF APPEARED TO BE IN AGREEMENT WAS THE NECESSITY FOR BOLIVIA TO ABSTAIN FROM SELF-DEFEATING THREATS OF VIOLENCE, MUCH LESS ACTUAL RECOURSE TO PHYSICAL FORCE, IN FAVOR OF PEACEFUL, DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES TOWARD RESOLVING THE COUNTRY'S CENTURY-OLD LANDLOCKED STATUS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRINCIPAL THEME OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION IN BOLIVIA DURING MARCH 1974 WAS THE RENEWED PROSPECT FOR MOVEMENT ON BOLIVIA'S DESIRE FOR AN ACCESS TO THE SEA, OPENED UP BY THE BANZER-PINOCHET MEETING IN BRASILIA AT MID-MONTH. EVEN BEFORE THE TWO PRESIDENTS HELD THEIR WIDELY-PUBLICIZED "SECRET" MEETING, POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN LA PAZ WERE ENGAGING IN INTENSIVE SPECULATION ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT SUCH AN ENCOUNTER COULD PRODUCE AN IMPROVEMENT IN BOLIVIAN-CHILEAN RELATIONS. PRESIDENT BANZER HIMSELF LENT CREDENCE TO SUCH SPECULATION UPON HIS RETURN MARCH 19 FROM THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT GEISEL. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, BANZER'S INITIAL COMMENTS UPON HIS INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT PINOCHET WERE AS FOLLOWS: QUOTE "PRESIDENT PINOCHET HAS EXPRESSED TO ME HIS WILLINGNESS TO SEEK A SOLUTION TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS (BETWEEN BOLIVIA AND CHILE), CONSIDERING THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM OF BOLIVIA IS ITS MARITIME REINTEGRATION. HE HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS GOOD WILL, AND LET US HOPE THAT IN A NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE WE CAN TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD THE SOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM." QUOTE. SUBSEQUENTLY, IN THE FACE OF PINOCHET'S STATEMENT THAT THE TWO PRESIDENTS HAD AGREED NOT TO DISCUSS BOLIVIA'S DESIRE FOR A SEA OUTLET, BANZER RETREATED TO THE POSITION THAT HE AND PINOCHET HAD QUOTE "DISCUSSED THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS THAT HAVE INTERRUPTED OUR RELATIONS (SINCE 1962)" QUOTE BUT THAT NO SPECIFIC DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO BOLIVIA'S LANDLOCKED STATUS HAD TAKEN PLACE.

3. ALTHOUGH THE BANZER-PINOCHET MEETING COINCIDED WITH THE BEGINNING OF BOLIVIA'S ANNUAL "WEEK OF THE SEA", COMMEMORATING THE LOSS OF ITS SEACOAST TO CHILE IN 1879, THE TONE OF THE PRESIDENT'S

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REMARKS APPEARS TO HAVE INFLUENCED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND MOST POLITICAL COMMENTATORS TO REDUCE TRADITIONAL PATRIOTIC RHETORIC IN FAVOR OF A PRAGMATIC SEARCH FOR POSSIBLE GROUNDS OF AGREEMENT WITH BOLIVIA'S PACIFIC COAST NEIGHBORS. THUS JAIME PONCE CABALLERO, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NATIONALIST POPULAR FRONT, CALLED UPON PUBLIC OPINION TO PUT ASIDE "DEMAGOGIC SLOGANS" AND SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT'S QUEST FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH CHILE. A CONSIDERABLE MAJORITY OF BOLIVIAN JOURNALISTIC AND

POLITICAL OPINION ALSO APPREARED TO APPROVE OF THE INITIAL BANZER-PINOCHET CONVERSATION, AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WORKING-LEVEL TALKS COULD SOON BE INITIATED BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

4. WHILE DISCUSSION OF THE PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVED BOLIVIAN-CHILEAN RELATIONS PREDOMINATED IN POLITICAL CIRCLES, A NUMBER OF OBSERVERS ALSO CONSIDERED THE PROBLEM OF BOLIVIA'S DESIRE FOR AN OUTLET TO THE SEA IN THE LARGER CONTEXT OF BOLIVIAN-CHILEAN-PERUVIAN TRILATERAL RELATIONS. HERE AN ATMOSPHERE OF PESSIMISM TENDED TO PREVAIL, DESPITE SPIRITED ATTEMPTS BY SOME COMMENTATORS TO RAISE THE POSSIBILITY OF A SUMMIT CONFERENCE OF THE THREE PRESIDENTS, AT WHICH AN ACCORD MIGHT BE REACHED TO GRANT BOLIVIA A "CORRIDOR" TO THE SEA. MORE TYPICAL OF BOLIVIAN VIEWS ON THE ATTITUDES OF ITS WESTER NEIGHBORS WAS THE COMMENT OF ONE POLITICIAN THAT "PERU IS WILLING TO GIVE US AN OUTLET TO THE SEA, THROUGH ANTOFAGASTA, AND CHILE WILL GLADLY GRANT US ACCESS TO THE SEA THROUGH TACNA."
STEDMAN

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-11 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 2024/2

5. BY THE END OF THE MONTH, THE MAJOR POINT UPON WHICH BOTH A GREAT NUMBER OF BOLIVIAN POLITICAL COMMENTATORS AND THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF APPEARED TO AGREE WAS THE NEED FOR BOLIVIA TO UNDERTAKE DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES, BOTH WITH ITS NEIGHBORS AND THROUGHOUT THE HEMISPHERE, TOWARD THE RESOLUTION OF ITS CENTURY-OLD LANDLOCKED STATUS. THE USE OF FORCE TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL WAS SPECIFICALLY RULED OUT BY PRESIDENT BANZER, FOREIGN MINISTER GUZMAN SORIANO AND SPOKESMEN FOR THE ARMED FORCES IN THEIR STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS. THUS, ON MARCH 29, AIR FORCE COMMANDER GENERAL CARLOS ALCOREZA STATED THAT THE ARMED FORCES WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK BOLIVIA'S "RETURN TO THE SEA" BY PACIFIC MEANS. THESE SENTIMENTS WERE REITERATED ON MARCH 30 BY GENERAL ALBERTO GUZMAN SORIANO, MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS, WHO NOTED THAT BOLIVIA IS PREPARED TO UNDERTAKE AN EXPANDED "CORDIAL DIALOGUE" WITH ITS NEIGHBORS IN THE SEARCH FOR NEW SOLUTIONS TO ITS PROBLEMS AS A LANDLOCKED NATION. FINALLY, PRESIDENT BANZER HIMSELF RE-AFFIRMED THE PACIFIC NATURE OF BOLIVIA'S REVITALIZED INTEREST IN THE PROBLEM OF OBTAINING ACCESS TO THE SEA ON MARCH 31, WHILE MAKING PUBLIC HIS PLAN TO MEET WITH A

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DISTINGUISHED GROUP OF CITIZENS (INCLUDING FORMER PRESIDENTS AND FOREIGN MINISTERS, POLITICAL PARTY AND LABOR LEADERS) TO SEEK THEIR IDEAS ON THE COUNTRY'S "MARITIME PROBLEM." BANZER NOTED THAT HE HAS RAISED THIS ISSUE AT EACH OF HIS MEETINGS WITH FOREIGN HEADS OF STATE OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, AND PLACED PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON HIS ATTEMPTS TO INFORM ALL OF THE NATIONS OF THE ANDEAN PACT OF BOLIVIA'S POINT OF VIEW.

6. A "TERRORIST" INCIDENT ON THE NIGHT OF MARCH 30 ALSO HAS CALLED ATTENTION TO THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S APPARENT DESIRE TO UNDERTAKE MAJOR NEW PEACEFUL INITIATIVES ON THE ACCESS TO THE SEA QUESTION. ACCORDING TO THE FULLEST ACCOUNT OF THE INCIDENT, PUBLISHED IN THE SEMI-OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER HOY, A DYNAMITE CHARGE WAS EXPLODED OUTSIDE THE HOUSE OF FOREIGN MINISTER GUZMAN BY THE "MOVEMENT FOR ARMED RECOVERY", MARKING THE START OF A CAMPAIGN CALLED "OPERATION DIGNITY." THE INITIAL LETTERS OF THE ALLEGED NEW MOVEMENT FORM THE SYMBOLIC WORD "MAR". GUZMAN AND PRESIDENT BANZER IMMEDIATELY CONDEMNED THE ATTACK AS THE WORK OF PERSONS WHO DO NOT HAVE FAITH IN THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO SECURE BOLIVIA'S LEGITIMATE MARITIME CLAIMS BY PEACEFUL MEANS. THE EMBASSY IS ALERT TO ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION WHICH MAY BECOME AVAILABLE ON THE COMPOSITION AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF THE GROUP BEHIND THIS ATTACK; AT THE SAME TIME, WE DO NOT DISCARD THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE INCIDENT MIGHT HAVE BEEN STAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF, AS A MEANS OF STIMULATING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ITS NEW DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES IN THIS POLICY AREA. IF THE DEVELOPMENTS OF RECENT WEEKS PROVIDE ANY RELIABLE GUIDE TO THE NEAR-TERM FUTURE, IT MAY BE EXPECTED THAT BOLIVIAN DIPLOMACY WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY ACTIVE IN SEARCH OF NEW

APPROACHES TO THE COUNTRY'S CENTURY-OLD QUEST FOR RENEWED
ACCESS TO THE SEA. TO THE EXTENT THAT THE BANZER GOVERNMENT
CONTINUES TO REAP POLITICAL BENEFIT FROM THIS CAMPAIGN,
WE ALSO MAY EXPECT TO SEE CONTINUING EFFORTS TO UNITE BOLIVIAN
DOMESTIC OPINION SOLIDLY BEHIND THAT GOVERNMENT IN DEFENSE
OF THE NATION'S "HIGHER INTERESTS" IN THE SPHERE OF FOREIGN
POLICY.
STEDMAN

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